

“Let Now the Astrologers Stand Up”: The Armenian Christian Reaction to Astrology and Divination

ROBERT W. THOMSON

Armenian enthusiasm for Byzantine learning can be clearly attested in many Armenian authors—even if it was tempered by a healthy mistrust of Byzantine politics.¹ But Byzantium was honored by the Armenians more as a depository of Christian learning than as a source of original and continuing scholarship. Over the centuries many Armenians came to Constantinople to seek out Greek texts and make translations, but remarkably little Greek literature composed after the end of the sixth century (i.e., after the rupture between the churches) was rendered into Armenian.

Byzantium was a Christian empire, and the classic works of patristic Greek writers remained the prime goal of Armenian translators. But the secular traditions of late antiquity were also of interest to them and Armenian versions of basic textbooks in such subjects as grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and science were of great significance in promoting the development of original Armenian scholarship in those areas.² Such secular traditions included topics that were not entirely welcome to the ecclesiastical authorities, who were the major sponsors of learning in Armenia. There are also modern scholars who think some of these subjects unworthy of the attention of a serious Byzantine.

¹Title quotation from Isaiah 47:13. This paper discusses the early Christian Armenian literature concerning astrology. The pre-Christian situation, exemplified by Trdat I's reputation as a “magus” (Pliny, *Natural History*, bk. 30, ch. 6, sec. 16), is not our concern; it had no echo in Armenian literature. For a discussion of the earlier period see N. G. Garsoïan, “Prolegomena to a Study of the Iranian Aspects in Arsacid Armenia,” *Handes Am-sorya* 90 (1976), 177–234, repr. in her *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians* (London, 1985).

²For a general overview see R. W. Thomson, “The Formation of the Armenian Literary Tradition,” in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. N. G. Garsoïan, T. F. Mathews, and R. W. Thomson (Washington, D.C., 1982), 135–50.

Discussing the ninth-century philosopher Leo's knowledge of Plato, a recent commentator states: “Less creditable to our way of thinking is his ownership of Paul (of Alexandria)'s Introduction to Astrology.”³ Alas, part of this too found its way into Armenian.

The editor of the Armenian version notes that the date of the translation is not certain, but may be put in or before the seventh century.⁴ The rendering is in the style of the “hellenizing school,” which is a general term for translations of an extreme literalness, but the texts in this style cannot be dated absolutely.⁵ Needless to add, such learned works were not the first intimation in Armenian of the existence of astrology. The Bible has numerous references to a wide range of “curious arts.” And patristic literature, of which so much was translated at an early period, abounds in diatribes against astrology, magic, and other undesirable practices.⁶ Interest in the subject was frequently condemned in canon law, and homilists were liberal in their warnings. So it may be of interest to examine some early Armenian texts in order to see the atmosphere in which Paul's work would have been received.

³N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (Baltimore, 1983), 84. For the place of Paul in antique tradition see W. Gundel and H. G. Gundel, *Astrologumena: Die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1966), 236–39.

⁴H. Bart'ikyan, “Aratos Solac'u ev Połos Ałek'sandrac'u as-tłbašxakan erkeri hin hayeren t'argmanut'yunē,” *Banber Maten-adaranı* 12 (1977), 137–62. The Armenian renders the prologue and the chapter on the zodiac.

⁵For a general view of this style with references to previous literature see Ch. Mercier, “L'école hellénistique dans la littérature arménienne,” *REArm* 13 (1978–79), 59–75; and A. Terian, “The Hellenizing School: Its Time, Place, and Scope of Activities Reconsidered,” in *East of Byzantium*, 175–86.

⁶For Greek patristic literature on the topic of astrology see U. Riedinger, *Die heilige Schrift im Kampf der griechischen Kirche gegen die Astrologie* (Innsbruck, 1956).

Original Armenian texts will be our prime concern,⁷ but it is impossible to disregard completely texts translated from Greek or Syriac. On the one hand, biblical terminology was so pervasive in Armenian writing that an author describing an Armenian phenomenon would naturally dress it in familiar garb, thereby laying many a trap for later critics. And on the other hand, themes from patristic texts might prove popular to Armenian authors, even if there was no local phenomenon. For example, a homily against attendance at immoral theatrical productions might be appropriate in Constantinople and come naturally to the lips of a John Chrysostom, but an Armenian homily on the same subject would hardly be good evidence for social mores in Armenia of the fifth or sixth centuries.⁸ Similarly, references to magic in the standard account of the conversion of Armenia tell us nothing about the secret strength of the Christians. It was a hagiographical commonplace for the persecutors of the martyrs to call them sorcerers.⁹

In this regard the comment of an earlier investigator of western evidence for roughly the same period has relevance also for Armenia: "There is the unfortunate tendency . . . in both official and unofficial references to astrology to group it with magic, augury, divination, and other pagan rites and superstitions."¹⁰ In what follows we also shall

find references to astrology mingled with extraneous matters.¹¹

Armenian writing is not contemporaneous with Armenian Christianity.¹² The first historians, writing in the fifth century, looked back over the past century with a viewpoint, as well as a vocabulary, different from that of the time described. So when P^cawstos describes the shah's consultations with soothsayers, astrologers, and Chaldaeans, he uses terms familiar from the Armenian version of the Old Testament.¹³ The exact role of these persons at the Sasanian court is thus obscured. It is somewhat ironic that their main guarantee of the arrival at court of the Armenian king was a gospel on which Christian priests had sworn an oath, and which the shah kept securely chained up in his treasury.¹⁴

P^cawstos does not mention astrology as such, but he does once refer to prognostication by the casting of dice (*k'ue*). When the apostate Meružan was pursuing the Armenian general Manuēl, he boasted of the latter's imminent capture. But worried by confusing directions as to the road to be followed, he resorted to "Chaldaean spells" and "cast dice."¹⁵ Despite his reputation as a magician

⁷Armenian names and terms are transliterated according to the system used in the *REArm*.

⁸Cf. the 17th homily attributed to John Mandakuni titled "Concerning impious and demonic theatres (*Vasn anōrēn t'aterac' diwakanac'*)," in *Yovhannu Mandakunwoy Čairk'* (Venice, 1860), 131–37, although John Chrysostom's *Contra ludos et theatra* is not attested in Armenian. More relevant to the present theme would be the works on Fate (περὶ ἐλμαρμένης) by John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa, but neither is attested in Armenia. But Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron*, of which the sixth homily is particularly relevant, was well known in Armenia. There is a recent edition by K. Muradyan, *Barseł Kesarac'i: Yatağs Vec'awreay Ararč'uēan* (Erevan, 1984), but he did not take sufficiently into account the fact that the Armenian was translated from a discursive Syriac rendering, not directly from the Greek original.

⁹Armenian *kaxard*; see Agat'angelos, *Patmuē'awn Hayoc'*, ed. G. Ter-Mkrtč'ean and St. Kanayecanč' (Tiflis, 1909; repr. Delmar, N.Y., 1979), 203–4, trans. R. W. Thomson, *Agathangelos: History of the Armenians* (Albany, 1976). See further Elišē, *Vasn Vardanac' ew Hayoc' Paterazmin*, ed. E. Ter-Minasean (Erevan, 1957), 42, and references in R. W. Thomson, *Elišē: History of Vardan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), note 5 ad loc.

Other historical works have to be treated with equal circumspection. A long description of a visit by a doctor to a patient in Elišē's *History of Vardan* comes directly from Philo and cannot be used in a study of Armenian medical practice; Thomson, *Elišē*, note 2 to p. 172 of the Armenian text.

¹⁰M. Laistner, "The Western Church and Astrology during the Early Middle Ages," *HTR* 34 (1941), 251–75, p. 253 note 5.

¹¹There is not a great deal of secondary literature on this subject. Modern scholars have tended to devote their attention either to texts dealing with "scientific" astronomy or to superstitious practices. B. E. T'umanyan, *Hay Astlagit'yan Patmuē'yun* (History of Armenian Astronomy) (Erevan, 1964), deals with calendars and astronomical instruments. J. R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), has valuable information on magic based on a wide range of sources. The older work by L. Ališan, *Hin Hawatk' ham Het'anosakan Krōnk' Hayoc'* (The Old Faith, or Pagan Armenian Religion) (Venice, 1910), has useful evidence from later sources, but—as so often in works by Ališan—exact references to those sources are not always given.

¹²For the stages of the conversion of Armenia see R. W. Thomson, "Mission, Conversion, and Christianization: The Armenian Example," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12–13 (1988–89), 28–45.

¹³P^cawstos, *Buzandaran Patmuē'awnk'* (St. Petersburg, 1883; repr. Delmar, N.Y., 1984), IV 54, trans. N. G. Garsofian, *The Epic Histories* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989): the Persian shah Šapuh summoned the *diwt's* and *astetagēts* and *k'awdeays*. *Astetagēt*, "astrologer," only occurs in the Bible at Isa. 47:13, but the term *gēt* occurs some twenty times, with *diwt*, "soothsayer," at 2 Chron. 35:19, with the verb *diwt'el* at 1 Kings 28:8–9, and with *k'atdeay* at Dan. 2:2. This last, "Chaldaean," is variously spelled *k'awdeay* or *k'atdeay*.

¹⁴P^cawstos, *ibid*.

¹⁵P^cawstos, V 43: Meružan tried to find his way by "Chaldaean divination, *hmays k'akdēut'ean*," by "casting dice, *zk'ueš harč'anēr*," and by "magic charms, *yurūt' kaxardanac'n*." Later in the same chapter he is described as a "magician, soothsayer, and diviner, *kaxard, diwt', k'ueic'n kaxard*." Meružan resorted to divination because he was given an enigmatic reply to his question about the road: "The road lies through the Horns." This was the name of local mountains. But the term also refers to the points of the

and sorcerer, and in spite of his disguise, he was recognized by Manuēl in the ensuing encounter and slain.

Other early Armenian historians have little to say about Armenian practices. Elišē refers to "Chaldaeanism" as equivalent to magism, and to the shah's "Chaldaeans" as a group similar to the magi.¹⁶ But these were Iranian officials. Łazar, who continues Elišē's account of Armenian-Iranian relationships into the second half of the fifth century, does not mention these "Chaldaeans." His references to magic are traditional insults against Christianity put into the mouths of Persians.¹⁷

The antiquarian Movsēs Xorenac'i offers rather more information, though his evidence for ancient practices must be balanced by his later date. He once refers to astrology as such, indicating that in Persian tales Biwrasp Azdahak gained his strength from *astetabanu'iwn*.¹⁸ Although this is an exact calque on ἀστρολογία, it is quite a rare word in Armenian. Movsēs also knows of Persian stories concerning Papag and the prophecy of the "astrologers." Here he uses the term *axtarmol*, an even rarer word, which he glosses as "Chaldaeans," his only use of either term.¹⁹ For Armenia proper Movsēs refers to various kinds of magic, and he describes divination by plane trees at Armavir.²⁰

arc of the moon. Since in Armenia divination by the moon is attested (see *lusnaxtirk'* below, p.310), perhaps Meružan thought that there was more to the response than a statement of geography.

¹⁶P. 15, 18 of the Armenian text.

¹⁷Łazar P'arpec'i, *Patmu'iwn Hayoc'*, ed. G. Ter-Mkrtč'ean and St. Malxasean (Tiflis, 1904; repr. Delmar, N.Y., 1986), 79, 81, trans. with commentary in R. W. Thomson, *The History of Łazar P'arpec'i* (Atlanta, 1991). Cf. also Yovhannēs Mamikonean, *Patmu'iwn Tarōnoy* (Venice, 1889), 54, trans. by L. Avdoyan, *Pseudo-Yovhannēs Mamikonean's History of Tarōn* (forthcoming): the Persians taunt the Armenian soldiers, calling them *kaxardasar* (as Acts 19:19), who hope to conquer by magic.

¹⁸Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmu'iwn Hayoc'*, ed. M. Abetean and S. Yartu'iwnian (Tiflis, 1913; repr. Delmar, N.Y., 1981), "From the Fables of the Persians," which is a short section between books 1 and 2 of the *History*, p. 91 of the Armenian text. The date of Movsēs' *History* remains disputed. The arguments for an 8th-century date, not in the 5th century as the author of the work claims, are presented in the introduction to the translation by R. W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978).

¹⁹*History*, II 70. The plural noun *axtark'* is used in the sense of "horoscope" (for which see note 95 below), though it is also rare in early texts; cf. the Armenian version of Ephrem, "On the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem," *Matenagru'iwnk'* (Venice, 1836), vol. 4, p. 52: "You abandoned the Trinity and loved vain gods, demons and horoscopes (*axtars*) and material likenesses."

²⁰See I 20 for divination, *hmayk'*. He uses the same term to describe Eruand's "evil eye," II 42, and for the reason for the

But he has nothing to say about the stars foretelling fate or fortune.²¹

More information comes from the fifth-century writer Eznik. Basing his work on a wide range of patristic and pagan Greek sources, he sought to refute those who supposed that evil had an existence in and of itself. His themes are the nature of God and man's free will; his opponents are pagan philosophers, Zurvanite Persians, and Marcionites.²² His closely reasoned treatise offers a wealth of information about popular beliefs and erroneous ideas that Satan and the demons have introduced to mankind. But it is not always clear whether Eznik has in mind contemporary Armenian practices, or is elaborating on a foreign source. However, this work, which has brought him fame in modern times, was untypical of early Armenian literature. Eznik was not at all involved in those questions of Christian theology that were the hot issues of the fifth century. It would not be difficult to suppose that his obvious themes—paganism, Zurvanism, Marcion—were soon considered dead issues, and that his basic motif of free will was thought irrelevant to the christological controversies that came to divide Christendom.

Eznik devotes several pages to the question of predestination: Are men's life-spans fixed in advance by a decree (*hraman*)? This is what the Chaldaean astrologers say, in that the position of the planets relative to the zodiac at the time of a person's birth determines his fate.²³ Eznik has no difficulty in showing the illogical conclusions to which such ideas would lead—his usual method of refutation—though his actual exposition of the theories attacked is somewhat confused.²⁴ More interesting is the fact that the term "astrologers" occurs only once in his book. Eznik uses the very rare

Persians' plundering of the bones of the Armenian kings at Ani, III 27. For *hmayk'* see further below, p. 309.

²¹Movsēs is the prime authority for Armenian traditions about Bēl, whom he identifies with Nimrod, I 5. The parallel version of the settlement of Armenia, the "Primary History" published as a preface to the work of Sebēos, notes that Bēl used "apparent magic" (*ar ač'awk' kaxardut'eamb*) "to attain his ends" (*Patmu'iwn Sebēosi*, ed. G. V. Abgaryan [Erevan, 1979], 49; trans. of the "Primary History" in Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, 357–68). But there is no trace in these stories of Nimrod's reputation as an astronomer; cf. Ch. Haskins, "Nimrod the Astronomer," *The Romanic Review* 5 (1914), 203–12.

²²Eznik de Kołb, *De Deo*, ed. L. Mariès and Ch. Mercier, PO 28, 3, 4 (Paris, 1959). For analysis of the themes and discussion of the sources see L. Mariès, "Le *De Deo* d'Eznik," *REArm* 4 (1924), 1–213.

²³Eznik, 216.

²⁴Note 522 to the French translation of Mariès, as in note 22.

word *astetanšmar*, a compound with biblical overtones.²⁵

That the Chaldaeans invented astronomy was a commonplace known from earlier sources.²⁶ David the “Invincible” Philosopher indicates that the clear sky in that part of the world enabled the Chaldaeans to comprehend easily the movements of the heavenly bodies.²⁷ A different idea is found in the Scholia to Ps.-Nonnus: the Babylonians invented astronomy through Zoroaster.²⁸

Elišē, in the *Questions on Genesis*,²⁹ picks up the theme of the stars controlling men’s fate. “Moses said in Gen. 1:14: God created (the stars) to be for signs. Can what the astronomers (*astetabašxk*) say be true?” In response, Elišē indicates that men’s fate and destiny bear no relation to the movements of the stars. God is indeed responsible for their movement, but they serve as signs only in the sense that they indicate the weather. What a man does for good or evil is within his own capacity and free will. Elišē, however, is more concerned with magic and incantations, and this text has no other reference to astrology or any other method of foretelling the future. In another homily attributed to Elišē, “On the Souls of Men,” references to astrology only elaborate themes from the Old Testament.³⁰ Nor is a “Questionnaire” attributed to Gregory the Illuminator (which has certain parallels with Eznik) very helpful. It deals with the abil-

ities of magicians (*kaxardk*), beginning with references from the Old Testament, and goes on to list the weapons of Satan: *kaxardut’iwn*, *t’ovč’ut’iwn*, *diwt’ut’iwn*, *astetagitut’iwn*, and “similar things.”³¹

The most important source for early Armenian practices of divination is one of the homilies attributed to John (Yovhannēs) Mandakuni. John was Catholikos in the second half of the fifth century.³² He is praised by the historian Łazar, who ends his *History* with a long sermon purportedly given by John on the occasion of Vahan Mamikonean’s appointment as *marzpan* of Armenia.³³ However, the collection of homilies published under his name is of uncertain authorship. They have also been attributed to a later John, Mayragomec’i, of the seventh century.³⁴ The latter was a fierce opponent of reunion with the Greek church. The homilies deal with matters of more general pastoral interest than the technical christological issues that so stirred Mayragomec’i, and their editor has noted that some appear in Armenian collections of homilies attributed to Ephrem the Syrian.³⁵ Their precise origin remains unclear.

In homily 26 John deals with divination in a multitude of forms.³⁶ He is also interested in—or rather, opposed to—spells, amulets, false expectations from relics, dreams, and similar matters, in which even the clergy might indulge. Magic is not here our concern, but his comments on various kinds of foreknowledge by divination are valuable and rare evidence.

The stars are only mentioned once in a long list of divinatory practices. It may be helpful to list these terms (in the order in which they appear) and to indicate evidence in other early Armenian sources for their use:³⁷

²⁵ Isa. 47:13: “Astrologers who observe the stars of heaven, *astetagit’k n or nšmaren zastets erknic*.”

²⁶ Known in Armenia, for example, was Philo’s *Quaestiones in Genesim* (Armenian text in *Mnac’ordk*, ed. M. Awgerean [Venice, 1826]), III 1, IV 88.

²⁷ David, *Sahmank ew Tramatu’iwnk Imastasirut’ean*, ed. S. S. Arevšatyan (Erevan, 1960), repr. with English trans. and notes as *Definitions and Divisions of Philosophy*, by B. Kendall and R. Thomson (Chico, Calif., 1983), ch. 17.

²⁸ “Nonnos: Die Scholien zu fünf Reden des Gregor von Nazianz,” ed. A. Manandian, *Zeitschrift für armenische Philologie* 1 (1903), 220–300, I 63 (I 70 in the Syriac: S. Brock, *The Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Nonnos Mythological Scholia* [Cambridge, 1971]).

The 13th-century Vardan refers to Abraham learning astronomy (but there *astetagitut’iwn* in place of the *astetabašxut’iwn* of Philo, David, and Ps.-Nonnos), *Hawak’umn Patmufean Vardanay Vardapeti*, ed. L. Ališan (Venice, 1862), 16 (trans. and commentary in R. W. Thomson, “The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc’i,” *DOP* 43 [1989], 125–226). But Vardan is indebted to the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian; and here the theme goes back to Jubilees. See further Riedinger, p. 110–16. Vardan, *ibid.*, defines Chaldaeanism as “soothsaying of the stars, *hmayut’iwn astetac*.”

²⁹ Elisē Vardapet, *Questions et réponses sur la Genèse*, publiée par P. Nerses Akinian, traduit par P. Sahak Kogian (Vienna, 1928), Question 32, pp. 33–36.

³⁰ Elišē, *Matenagrut’iwnk* (Venice, 1859), 375–76. Here he also equates the magi, the Chaldaeans, and astrology.

³¹ N. Adontz, “Le questionnaire de saint Grégoire et ses rapports avec Eznik,” *ROC* 25 (1925–26), 317.

³² G. Garitte, *La Narratio de Rebus Armeniae*, CSCO, Subsidia 4 (Louvain, 1952), 426.

³³ Łazar, *Patmuf’iwn*, 179–82.

³⁴ References in Garitte, *Narratio*, 348.

³⁵ Introduction to the Armenian text (note 8 above), 5.

³⁶ This homily has been translated in part by F. Feydit, “La XXVI^e homélie de Jean Mandakouni,” in *Mélanges offerts à Jean Dauvillier* (Toulouse, 1979), 293–306, but without comparison with other Armenian texts. In his discussion of this homily Ališan, *Hin Hawatk*, ch. 11, notes some parallels with later authors, but does not collate the earlier evidence. Not available to me was the general study on John Mandakuni by B. Sargisean, *K’nmadatut’iwn Mandakunwoy* (Venice, 1896).

³⁷ Pp. 193–94 of the Armenian text. Where expressions are rare or unusual I have also added some references to authors writing in the 10th or later centuries, but without attempting a full study of that evidence.

*xtirk*³⁸: “soothsaying, augury.” This does not appear in the Armenian Bible. In the translation of the *Teaching of Addai* attributed to Labubna,³⁸ it renders the Syriac *nexše*. The two compounds *lusnaxtirk*³⁹ and *seljuxtirk*⁴⁰ are noted below.

*hmayk*⁴¹: “divination, spell.” This is more usual than the abstract from *hmayut’iwn*, which appears below.³⁹ It occurs frequently in the Bible, in P’awstos, Movsēs, and Eznik, as noted above, and in the canons.⁴⁰ The form *hmayeak*, “amulet,” is found in Gregory of Narek, where he describes myron as a “destroyer of *hmayeaks*,”⁴¹ and in the canons.

kewos: “divination.” In Labubna this renders the Syriac *qešme*, but generally in Armenian it occurs in combination, with stem spelled *kiws*: *kiwsahmay*, Zech. 3:8 and Jer. 27:9, and *kiwsakertoł* in Gregory Magistros, Letter 4.⁴²

diwt’ut’iwn: “sorcery.” This is a very common term. In the Bible the noun *diwt*⁴³ occurs once (2 Chron. 35:19), but the verb *diwt’el* and the abstract noun are common. It is also found in P’awstos, Movsēs Xorenac’i, Eznik, the Scholia to Ps.-Nonnus, and numerous canons. The noun *diwt’aran*, which indicates the place where soothsaying took place, is found in the Scholia⁴³ and Gregory Magistros, Letter 61.⁴⁴

t’ovč’ut’iwn: “wizardry.” This is also found in the Bible, Eznik, Elišē’s *Questions*, and canon law.

hataharc’ut’iwn: “divination by grains.” This is found only in the Armenian version of John Chrysostom, *On Ephesians*, homily 6, where the Armenian expands on the Greek.⁴⁵

However, in David of Ganjak the term *hatahmayut’iwn* (for *hmayut’iwn* see below) is found.⁴⁶ The person who threw the grains was called *hatēnkēc*⁴⁷, and this term occurs in another work attributed to John Mandakuni⁴⁷ and in Letter 4 of Gregory Magistros.⁴⁸ A parallel may be found in David of Ganjak, ch. 95, who refers to consultation of the *garēnkēc*’s, “crithomancers (those who threw barley).”⁴⁹

hawahmayut’iwn: “divination by birds.” The parallel nouns *hawahmayk*⁵⁰ and *hawadit’ut’iwn*, and the nouns for the diviner, *hawaharc*⁵¹, and *hawagēt*, occur in the Bible. *Hawahmayk*⁵² renders ὀρνέοσκοποι in the Armenian version of Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, IV 37.⁵⁰ But the term is not common in Armenian. Vardan, in his *Chronicle*, claims that Maniton discovered *hawahmayut’iwn*.⁵¹

matābaxut’iwn: “divination by sieve.” The only other attested use of this term in early Armenian is in the passage from John Chrysostom, *On Ephesians*, quoted above,⁵² where the Armenian expands on the Greek and precise parallels are not clear.

k’uaharc’ut’iwn: “divination by throwing dice.” This seems to be the only use of the abstract noun. *K’uē* occurs in P’awstos,⁵³ in the Bible (only at Hos. 4:12), and in the canons. Movsēs Dasxuranc’i refers to Bishop Israyēl burning the “destructive magical dice” (*zk’uēs korusič’s hmayic*) of the Huns.⁵⁴

hetaharut’iwn: “divination by water”(?). The term is not found elsewhere, so various corrections have been proposed. Feydit suggests *-harc’ut’iwn*, “interrogation,” for *-harut’iwn*, “striking,” and Ačarean suggests that the first syllable might be *her*, “hair.” Baronian and Conybeare propose *hotaharut’iwn*, which they associate with *razmarkut’iwn*, “an

³⁸ Labubna, *T’ut’ Abgaru*, ed. L. Ališan (Venice, 1868), 33; Syriac text in W. Wright, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London, 1865; repr. Amsterdam, 1967).

³⁹ For its etymology see Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, 443.

⁴⁰ The evidence from the canons is discussed below.

⁴¹ Grigor Narekac’i, *Girk’ Otergut’ean* (Buenos Aires, 1948; repr. Delmar, N.Y., 1981), no. 93.18, trans. in I. Kechichian, *Grégoire de Narek: Le livre de prières*, SC 78 (Paris 1961). *Hmayeak* is also a fairly common personal name; twelve examples are listed in H. Ačarean, *Hayoc’ anjannumneri Bačaran*, 5 vols. (Erevan, 1942–62; repr. Beirut, 1972), s.v.

⁴² Grigor Magistros, *T’herēž*, ed. K. Kostaneanc’ (Alexandropol, 1910), 14.

⁴³ But there, IV 12, it refers to the oracle at Dodone.

⁴⁴ Gregory Magistros, p. 139.

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Pauline Epistles*, Armenian version, *Meknut’iwn T’Hoc’ Pawłosi* (Venice, 1862), 734; cf. PG 62, col. 48. The Armenian reads: *i hmays ew i kaxardut’iwns ew i matābaxut’iwns ew i hataharc’ut’iwns ew i t’ovč’ut’iwns*, where the Greek has merely: ὁλωνιζομένων, καὶ φαρυμακείαις καὶ κληδονισμοῖς καὶ ἐπωδαῖς.

⁴⁶ *The Penitential of David of Ganjak*, ed. and trans. C. J. F. Dowsett, CSCO, *Scriptores Armeniaci* 3, 4 (Louvain, 1961), ch. 95 (p. 82).

⁴⁷ See below in the discussion of canon law, p. 311.

⁴⁸ P. 14.

⁴⁹ Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, 442, quotes the same term from Si-mēon of Ajñnik’ and Vardan Aygekc’i.

⁵⁰ *Koč’umn Ėncayut’ean* (Vienna, 1832), 71.

⁵¹ P. 9.

⁵² See note 45.

⁵³ See above, p. 306.

⁵⁴ Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *Patmut’iwn Ačarianc’ Ačxarhi*, ed. M. Emin (Moscow, 1860; repr. Tiflis, 1912), II 41, trans. by C. J. F. Dowsett, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxuranc’i* (London, 1961).

- Arabic word meaning 'sand'. Divination by sand is attested, but the word is *raml*.⁵⁵
- hmayut'awn*: "divination." More usual than this abstract noun is the form *hmayk'*, discussed above.⁵⁶
- mijagitut'awn*: The meaning is unclear; *měj* (giving *mij* in combination) means "middle," and *gi-tut'awn* is the abstract noun from *gēt*, "knower, savant," used of astrologers in the Old Testament. Cf. the equally obscure *t'iknagēt* in the canons.
- grararut'awn*: "making of phylacteries." This is also found in the canons. John Mandakuni and David of Ganjak also refer to phylacteries.⁵⁷
- astetagitut'awn*: "astrology." The abstract noun is not common in Armenian; it occurs once in the canons, and in Labubna (where it renders *kukbe*, "stars"). The form *astetagēt*, "astrologer," occurs once in the Bible (Isa. 47:13), the more common biblical expression being simply *gēt*. It is also found in P^cawstos and Elishē's *Questions*. As noted above, Eznik uses the rare form *astetanšmar*, based on the quotation from Isaiah.
- diwaharut'awn*: "consultation of demons." This term is not attested elsewhere. The *Nor Bagirk' Haykazean Lezui* (NBHL)⁵⁸ gives one reference to a similar term, *diwahmayut'awn*, in a collection of homilies. If the stem *harc'* has been confused with *har* (cf. *hetaharut'awn* above), then *diwaharut'awn* means simply "demon possession." The adjective *diwahar* is very common in the Bible and elsewhere.
- awrahmayk'*: This is a hapax: *awr*, "day," and *hmayk'*, as above. On p. 199 of his homily John expands on those who distinguish days, and on p. 210 he quotes Gal. 4:10, where Paul castigates those who distinguish (*xtren*, cf. *xtirk'* above) days, months, and times.
- lusnaxtirk'*: "auguries by the moon." This and the following compound with *xtir* seem not to be attested elsewhere.
- šetjuxtirk'*: "auguries by (observing) heaps or piles." This is a hapax in Armenian.

ozotnahmayk': This too is a hapax. *Hmayk'* is discussed above but *ozotn* is not an Armenian stem.

detahmayk': "divination by potions." The text reads *getahmayk'*, but Feydit proposes this simple correction.⁵⁹ The word is otherwise unattested. *Deł* is "potion, medicine, or poison," and *detatu* is discussed below.⁶⁰

snnikon: "amulet, phylactery." The term appears in John Chrysostom, *On I Timothy*, homily 10,⁶¹ in a long list: *hmayk'*, *kiwsk'*, *xtirk'*, *cnnundk'*, *patahark'*, *snikonk'*, *diwt'ut'awnk'*, *t'ovč'ut'awnk'*. The Greek text (PG 62 col. 552) reads: οἰωνισμοὺς καὶ κληρονομισμούς, παρατηρήσεις, γενέσεις, σύμβολα, περιάμματα, μαντείας, ἐπωδάς, μαγείας. In Chrysostom, *ibid.*, homily 13,⁶² *περίσπτα* is rendered by *snikons*. The meaning is also clear from John Mandakuni's own homily 9, p. 83, where it is linked with *paharan*.⁶³

yuruf's: "talisman." This appears once in the Bible (2 Macc. 12:40), but is common in Armenian. It is found in P^cawstos, Movsēs Xorenac'i, Eznik, and the canons. Gregory of Narek, 75.12 and 93.18, indicates that the cross and myron are effective antidotes. The person casting such spells is *yuruf'ot*, a term found in the canons, and in the title to this homily by Mandakuni. David of Ganjak, ch. 95, refers to *jururuf'ots*, "hydromancers."⁶⁴

baxts: In the singular this means "fate." Eznik, § 174, emphasizes that this has no existence of its own, but is merely an attribute. However, the plural in Isa. 65:11 gives the impression that something personal is involved. Gregory of Narek uses the plural, 51.4, as parallel to *hmayk'*.

cakatagir: "fate, what is decreed" (lit., written on the forehead). Eznik, §206, associates this term with *baxt* and the hopes of those who gaze at the stars.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Feydit, "La XXVI^e homélie" (as note 36), p. 305 note 28. The letters *g* and *d* are similar in Armenian script.

⁶⁰ P. 312.

⁶¹ P. 85 of the Armenian text.

⁶² P. 105 of the Armenian text.

⁶³ In a text "On the Nicaean Faith" in the Armenian Evagrius, ed. B. Sargisean (Venice 1907), 139, *snikon* renders φυλακτήριον (PG 28, col. 837B); but the Armenian was translated from the Syriac, not directly from the Greek. See I. Hausherr, "Les versions syriaque et arménienne d'Evagre le Pontique," *Or Chr* 22 2 (no. 69) (Rome, 1931).

⁶⁴ Cf. also Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, 443–44.

⁶⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, III 15, uses the participle *cakatagreal* in the heading of a letter supposedly sent by Emperor Julian, "destined (for immortality)."

⁵⁵ H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. M. Cowan (New York, 1976), s.v. *raml*. Feydit, "La XXVI^e homélie," note 25; H. Ačařean, *Hayeren Armatakan Bařaran*, 4 vols. (Erevan, 1971–79), s.v.; S. Baronian and F. C. Conybeare, *Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1918), 235 (describing MS no. 113).

⁵⁶ P. 309 above.

⁵⁷ Mandakuni, p. 192, *gir paharan*; David, ch. 95, *pahapan*.

⁵⁸ NBHL = *Nor Bařirk' Haykazean Lezui*, ed. G. Awetik'ean, X. Siwrmēlean, and M. Awgerean, 2 vols. (Venice, 1836–37; repr. Erevan, 1979, 1981).

*bzzank*⁶⁵: “talismans or amulets.” This term only occurs in the Bible at 2 Macc. 12:40 (cf. *yuruf*’s), but is found in the canons. Gregory of Narek, 66.4, links these last two terms: prayer is the antidote to the devil’s attempts at magic worked through *bzzank*⁶⁵ *inč*⁶⁵ *yurtic*⁶⁵.

harcuk: “oracle.” (This occurs earlier in John’s homily, at p. 190, not in the list just discussed.) Movsēs Xorenac’i, II 13, uses the term for the Pythian oracle; it is frequent in the Bible and the canons.

jeṛnacu: “sorcerer, conjuror.” (This occurs after the list just discussed, on p. 195, where it is applied to women.) It is not common in Armenian. It is found in the canons; and in his eulogy to myron, holy oil, Gregory of Narek mentions that it repels many kinds of magicians, including *jeṛnacus*,⁶⁶ whom he condemns without further explanation.

This list in John Mandakuni does not have any clear logic to it. The same is true of similar lists in patristic authors, some of which contain several of the practices mentioned by John. Texts in John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem have been cited above. Such lists also appear in scripture, the longest at Deut. 18:10, where seven terms are found: *diwt’ut’iwn*, *hmayel*, *hawaharc*⁶⁷, *kaxardel*, *vhuk*,⁶⁷ *nšanagēt*,⁶⁸ *zmereals harc’anel*.⁶⁹

The closest parallels to the divinatory practices attacked by John Mandakuni may be found in the collection of Armenian canon law. The first Armenian council whose canons were set down in Armenian was that held at Šahapivan in 447.⁷⁰ (The various gatherings of the fourth century described by P’awstos have not left a written record of their resolutions.) Canons 8, 9, and 10 of Šahapivan deal with magic or the casting of spells. Precise forms of magic are not described; it is simply declared that *kaxardut’iwn* is worse than “mere” (*lok*)

diwt’ut’iwn.⁷¹ Not a word is said about astrology. Canon 9 indicates that those who frequent *harc’uks* or engage in sorcery (*diwt’el*) have to pay a fine. If they are bishops or priests, then they are also unfrocked.

Of less certain date are canons attributed to an earlier period. Those ascribed to Gregory the Illuminator condemn *t’ovič*’s to five years of excommunication, and the *jeṛnacus* to one;⁷² those ascribed to Thaddaeus, the legendary founder of Christianity in Armenia in apostolic times, state that magicians (*kaxard*) are to be treated as apostates;⁷³ and those attributed to Nersēs Catholicos impose five years’ penance on believers in the spells worked by amulets (*hmayic bzzank*⁶⁵).⁷⁴ A later work on repentance ascribed to John Mandakuni lists among sinners those who are *t’ovič*’ and those who frequent *vhuks* and *hatēnkēč*’s.⁷⁵ These last were mentioned in his homily on spells. *Vhuk*, “sorcerer,” is very common in the Old Testament and in translated texts, both from Greek and Syriac.⁷⁶ Movsēs Dasxuranc’i includes them among those who led opposition to Christianity among the Huns: *kaxardk*⁶⁵, *kawdeayk*⁶⁵, *vhukk*⁶⁵, *k’rmapetk*⁶⁵ (pagan priests), who performed incantations (*diwt’ut’iwns*) and spells (*uruf*’s).⁷⁷

The foreign canons translated into Armenian very frequently inveigh against various kinds of astrology and magic. But as with homilies, such evidence from outside must be used with caution as regards actual Armenian practice. Specific references to the stars are rare, but other means of foretelling one’s fate are more common. The fifteenth of the Apostolic Canons (translated from Syriac)⁷⁸ condemns those who go to *kaxards*, *harc’uks*, *k’awdeays*, *vhuks*, or who believe in horoscopes (*cnundk*⁶⁵)⁷⁹ and astrology (*astēlagit’ut’iwnk*⁶⁵, in the plural).⁸⁰ The thirty-sixth canon of Laodicaea⁸¹

⁷¹ Canon 10, in vol. I, 442; in canon 8 *kaxardut’iwn* is equated with apostasy.

⁷² Canons 12, 27 in vol. I, 246, 249.

⁷³ Canon 22, in vol. II, 35.

⁷⁴ Canon 26, in vol. II, 261.

⁷⁵ Vol. II, 300–301.

⁷⁶ In Labubna it renders the Syriac *zakure*. Movsēs Xorenac’i, I 15, uses the abstract noun *vhukut’iwn* of Semiramis’ magic arts. See also Gregory Magistros, Letter 61, p. 139, where he refers to those who have recourse to *vhuks*. See Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, 442, for the etymology.

⁷⁷ *Patmut’iwn Aṭhunic*⁶⁵, II 41.

⁷⁸ *Kanonagirk*⁶⁵, I, 37.

⁷⁹ Lit. “births.” In Labubna it renders the Syriac *bet yalda*.

⁸⁰ The fortieth canon of the Apostolic Canons, which were rendered from Greek, forbids clergy from being involved in dice (*k’uē*). But since this is linked with drunken revelry (*ginarbu*), this canon may have no relevance for soothsaying!

⁸¹ *Kanonagirk*⁶⁵, vol. I, 237.

⁶⁶ Gregory, 93.18.

⁶⁷ See below, p. 311.

⁶⁸ Lit. “knower of signs.” The only reference in the *NBHL* is to a commentary on Deuteronomy by Vardan (unpublished).

⁶⁹ “To interrogate the dead.” The noun *meṛelaharc’uac* occurs in the Armenian version of Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, IV 37, rendering the Greek νεκρομαντεῖα. The only parallel in Armenian authors noted by the *NBHL* is *meṛelaharc’uk*, found in a commentary on Isaiah by the 13th-century George of Skevra; the passage is quoted by Ališan, *Hin Hawatk*⁶⁵, 423.

⁷⁰ The canons to be discussed are found in the two-volume collection *Kanonagirk*⁶⁵, ed. V. Hakobyan (Erevan, 1964, 1971). The canons of Šahapivan have also been published by N. Akiṇean in *Mxit’ar Tōnagirk*⁶⁵ (Vienna, 1949), 79–170.

forbids priests or monks from acting as *mogs*, *t'ovič's*, *diwt's*, *vhuks*, or from making *hmayeaks ew pahpans* (charms and phylacteries). The thirty-ninth canon of Basil⁸² also condemns those who pay attention to *hmays* and *harc'uks*.

A second set of canons attributed to Basil repeats some of the terms already familiar from John Mandakuni and introduces new ones. Canon 197⁸³ warns especially against *jeṛnacus*, *deṭahats*,⁸⁴ *lerdahmays*,⁸⁵ *t'iknagēts*,⁸⁶ *uirt'ots*, *hatēnkēc's*. Canon ninety⁸⁷ gives in abbreviated form the content of the tenth canon of Šahapivan. Canon 253⁸⁸ anathematizes those who consult the books of demons or the "tables (*c'oyc'*) of the moon and stars." Similarly, canon seventy-six⁸⁹ condemns those who in pagan fashion distinguish (*xtrē*, cf. *xtirk'* above) days and hours, or the old and new moon.

Talismans are mentioned only once. The second canon of those attributed to Epiphanius⁹⁰ condemns people who cast *uluns* for the sake of sooth-saying (*hmayut'iwn*), and those who engage in the making of phylacteries (*grararut'iwn*, as above).

The secular code of Mxit'ar Goš has no reference to astrology, but two laws concerning divorce are worth noting. Canons 145 and 195 forbid a man from divorcing or abandoning his wife without cause. However, fornication or other wicked deeds, such as magic (*kaxardut'iwn*) and the giving of philters (*deṭatuuut'iwn*) are grounds for divorce.⁹¹ It is precisely those two crimes of magic and philters that are linked together in the canons of Basil⁹² and Nersēs Šnorhali's *General Epistle*. Nersēs addressed that section of his long pastoral letter specifically to women.⁹³

⁸² *Kanonagirk'*, vol. 1, 354.

⁸³ *Kanonagirk'*, vol. 2, 102.

⁸⁴ Cf. *deṭahmayk'* above.

⁸⁵ I.e., divination by means of the liver. It occurs in the Bible at Ezek. 21.21, and in Eṭišē, *Matenagrut'iwnk'*, 375, where he refers to that biblical passage. The Scholia of Ps.-Nonnos I 15 refer to *lerdahmayut'iwn*, but I have found no other attestations in Armenian.

⁸⁶ This seems to be a hapax, *t'ikn-* meaning "back." Cf. *mijagutut'iwn* above.

⁸⁷ P. 122.

⁸⁸ P. 171.

⁸⁹ P. 119.

⁹⁰ P. 62.

⁹¹ *Girk' Datastani*, ed. X. T'orosyan (Erevan, 1975), 92, 113.

⁹² *Kanonagirk'*, vol. 1, 351; vol. 2, 102.

⁹³ *Ėndhanrakan T'ut' srboyn Nersisi Šnorhalwoy* (Jerusalem, 1871), 82 (Latin translation in *Sancti Nersētis Clajensis Opera*, I (Venice, 1833).

The name of Paul of Alexandria is absent from all these texts, nor is astrology in the technical sense often mentioned. In general the Armenian sources of the early period are not very informative about the practices condemned by canon law. Indeed, in Armenia, as in the medieval West, "prohibition of magic, augury, and other superstitious customs and beliefs is found frequently in the penitential literature. Yet astrology and astrologers as such are mentioned infrequently."⁹⁴ The Armenian terminology is not always clear, and when patristic sources are used, the application to Armenia of the practices mentioned can on occasion be more rhetorical than historical. Even the earliest attested horoscope does not predate the thirteenth century.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, although the evidence is not abundant, it remains clear enough that Armenians were no less interested in prognostication than other people of the time, and that such popular traditions were hard to eradicate.

⁹⁴ Laistner, "Western Church and Astrology," p. 265. Thus a study such as B. E. T'umanyan, *Hay Asthigutut'ean Patmut'yun* (History of Armenian Astronomy from the Oldest Times down to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century) (Erevan 1964), has no information on the topic of this paper.

⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that only one actual horoscope is clearly attested before the 15th century: in MS no. 1999 of the Matenadaran in Erevan. Of the 10,408 manuscripts listed in the general catalogue (*C'uc'ak Jeṭagrac' Mašt'oc'i anvan Matenadaran*, ed. O. Eganyan, A. Zeyt'unyan, and P. Ant'abyan, 2 vols. [Erevan, 1965, 1971]), 173 are classified as horoscopes (*axtark'*). MS 1999 is dated to the 13th century, but its place of writing is unknown. It is a general miscellany of 277 pages, containing various works on calendars as well as homilies attributed to Armenian, Greek, and Syrian authors. No horoscopes are dated to the 14th century; five are dated to the 15th century, one to the 16th, and all the rest to the 17th century or later. In Jerusalem, of the 3,235 manuscripts catalogued so far (*Mayr C'uc'ak Jeṭagrac' srboč' Yakobeanč'*, ed. N. Połarean, 9 vols. to date [Jerusalem, 1966–79]), only one horoscope is listed (in MS no. 3110 of the 17th century). Nor are horoscopes earlier than the 17th century attested in the indices to other published collections. But the second book published in Armenian (Venice, between 1511 and 1513) was a horoscope; R. H. Kévorkian, *Catalogue des "Incunables" arméniens*, *Cahiers d'Orientalisme* 9 (Geneva, 1986), 24.

For Armenian horoscopes see H. A. Anasyan, *Haykakan Matenagutut'yun*, I (Erevan, 1959), 424–67, "*axtarakan grakanut'iwn*." Of interest is also F. Feydit, *Amulettes de l'Arménie chrétienne* (Venice, 1986). For an Armenian text on the magical properties of numbers and modern survivals, see J. R. Russell, "The Book of the Six Thousand: An Armenian Magical Text," *Bazmavēp* 147 (1989), 221–43.